



GOT
INK?





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Got Ink?

Everything you need to know about selecting, getting and caring for a tattoo.



Getting a Tattoo

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Does it hurt?

This is the first question in this FAQ because it's usually the first question that people ask. The answer is yes. Having needles pierce your skin **does** hurt. But what you **really** want to know is, "How MUCH does it hurt, and can I handle it?"

It's not nearly as bad as what you might imagine. The pain comes from the cluster of needles on the tattooing machine piercing your skin very rapidly. This sensation, however, doesn't feel like the poking pain of an injection--it's more of a constant vibration. You will be amazed at how quickly your body releases endorphins, (pain killers), which dullens the pain significantly.

The pain will also vary according to where on your body you get worked on. Skin right above bones (collarbone, anklebone, etc.) tend to be more painful than other areas. In addition, certain types of needles seem to hurt more than others. I personally think the needles used for outlining produce a sharper, more noticeable pain, while the needles used for shading seem to be much more like an electrical buzz (nearly painless).

Remember, you are volunteering for the experience. The amount of pain will depend on your psychological attitude.

NOTE: Do not drink alcohol or take illegal drugs for pain relief purposes prior to your tattoo sessions. Both aspirin and alcohol thin your blood and promote excessive bleeding. Aspirin also decreases the clotting of blood, which will slow down your healing as well. In addition, artists do not appreciate dealing with drunks and is illegal in many states.

What about anaesthetics?

Some people say that taking a couple of over-the-counter analgesics before tattooing can take the edge off the pain. Acetaminophen, commonly sold under the brand name 'Tylenol' is generally recommended, but not aspirin, ibuprofen, or other NSAIDs, as they tend to inhibit clotting. In short, you may find yourself bleeding like the proverbial stuck pig. There **are** actually topical anaesthetics available, even in the stick-up-its-butt U.S. For instance, Bactine contains some lidocaine, and it is possible to buy benzocaine preparations over the counter. The drawback of these is that they do not work on unbroken skin, but if they are applied after the first pass with the needle, they **can** make a tremendous difference. EMLA is reputed to be much better, and will work on unbroken skin, but it is not generally available in the U.S.



Should i get a tattoo in the first place?

Your reading this may mean you're already interested in getting a tattoo, or may know someone who is. In a survey of 163 tattooed men and women, a third of them had regretted their tattoos! While most of this FAQ discusses the process once you've decided to get one, let's pause for a moment.

Why do I want one?

People get tattoos for different reasons. Is it to please your partner? Is it because you want to belong to a group that has tattoos? Do you identify with a certain sub-culture known for tattoos? Do you want to show your independence, individuality or uniqueness?

These are all valid reasons, and why many people get tattooed. However, because of the permanency of your tattoo, try to look at yourself in five, 10, or even 20 years. What will you be doing at that time? You might be a free-spirited college student now, and a web of vines on your wrist would look really lovely. However, are you planning to work in a very conservative field after you graduate? Will others look at your tattoo in a bad way? Will you have to hide it with long sleeve shirts? Are you *willing* to wear long sleeve shirts if the environment is negative?

Do you want a tattoo of a tiger because your partner's nickname is "Tiger," and you love the way s/he scratches your skin? Do you think you'll be with this person in five years? If not, how will you look at that tattoo? With fond memories, symbolizing a special period in your life? Or a shameful or painful reminder of somebody who hurt you and didn't care for you?

You're a headbanger (or a nose-smasher, ear-bopper or whatever) and you *REALLY* want a tattoo all over your arms just like Axl Rose, but you can't afford a professional artist so you get your friend with the mail-order tattooing machine to do those designs for you? Or perhaps you get spider webs tattooed all over your hands (or your face, which has happened) because you want to be "different" in school. What if you decide to "straighten out" and get a real job; train as a chef or something, and then no restaurant hires you?

GETTING IT REMOVED is *NOT* easy, and is *NOT* cheap. Expect to pay \$1,000 to remove even a fairly small-sized tattoo if you're looking at laser surgery. Expect to have a noticeable ugly scar if you go with a non-laser technique. Expect to pay for every penny out of your own pocket because health insurance companies will not pay for tattoo removal. There may not be a laser surgery specialist in your area. Then think of all those laser-surgery doctors who are going to get rich off of a person's foolishness or lack of careful thinking.



...Maybe tattooing isn't for you.

...Maybe you shouldn't get that \$10 tattoo your friend's been telling you he'll give you, in his garage.

...Maybe you shouldn't let your buddies tattoo your hand with India Ink and a needle at this weekend's party.

...Maybe you should get a tattoo on your back instead of on your hand.

...Maybe you should get a tattoo on your left wrist so it can be covered by your watch if you have to...

...And maybe after reading this FAQ, you'll think carefully about it, and make some informed, wise decisions about what to do with your body.

Tattooing can be beautiful.

Tattooing can be exhilarating.

Tattooing can open a whole new world for you.

...but make sure to do it *RIGHT*.

Religious (christian) arguments

A word to the religious: In Leviticus 19:28, it says not to tattoo "I am the Lord" on you (i.e. don't take the name of the Lord in vain). It does NOT say you can't mark yourself at all, and it does NOT say there's anything wrong about piercing. What it DOES say is that it prohibits mutilating yourself for the dead, which was a senseless practice at that time. But for Christians, they are no longer bound by the Law. Remember that it's not what you do; it's what's in your heart when you do it. The Talmud even mentions that it's not the tattooing that is wrong, but what the tattoo is of (i.e. if the tattoo is an image of a 'false god' as opposed to just a 'design').

There are probably many 'prim & proper' Christians out there that have had the urge to be tattooed, but have repressed it because they believed it was a sin. Well, if you really believe that it is a sin, then it is. But is getting tattooed really a sin? If it draws you away from Christ or causes someone else to stumble, then yes. But tattooing isn't any more special than anything else we distract ourselves with.

Take things in moderation at your speed. We are to deny ourselves of things if they cause us to lose sight of Jesus (for some, it could be driving a car, getting married, having children, going to work, smoking, abusing drugs & alcohol, disrespect, etc.). If you have good discernment, you know what distracts you from Christ and what doesn't.

Tattooing isn't inherently evil; it got it's 'evil' status because GOD-less heathens from places like the South Pacific were tattooed. Do what pleases GOD; and one thing that pleases GOD is to be confident in oneself (not overly prideful, but confidence tempered with discernment, almost bordering on arrogance). Tattooing can bring out that confidence, because to be tattooed requires commitment.



And that's a conquering power over fear and old ruts. GOD wants mature dynamic individuals that fear him to fellowship with, not people cowering in fear from some rigid set of laws. Note: fear of GOD is totally different from cowering in fear.

Some Christians will claim that drinking any amount of alcohol is sinful, but the medical community is saying that 2-3 drinks a day is good for the heart. Drink responsibly. So, for those that have repressed getting a tattoo because of family or religious upbringing, just do it. If it's not for you, fine--but don't ruin it for the others.

Tattooing in no way marks who's saved and who's not. If you've seen the trilogy "A Distant Thunder," the Mark of the Beast was tattooed on your right hand or forehead. The tattoo was 666 in binary '6's (i.e. 1 0 11 0 11 0 1 Sort of like a UPC code), but this doesn't mean that every tattoo is a Mark of the Beast.

People have stated that the credit card and the computer were tools of the Devil. So what? Everybody depends on both today, even if the Anti-Christ is to use the computer to control the population, it doesn't mean that if you use a computer, you're a follower of the Devil.

I believe that religion, when improperly used, is a dangerous thing. Christianity has wasted a lot of valuable time trying to influence people in believing that unimportant things are evil instead of spreading the word of GOD. Christianity (or those prideful, arrogant, self righteous leaders) has looked down on tattooing far too long.

A temporary alternative?

A) For those who might not be ready for the plunge, but are seriously considering what it would look/feel like to have a tattoo we recommend this.

Temptu now has a web page at <http://www.temptu.com> which describes their products. The following is from Roy at Temptu:

"The rice paper temporary tattoo you...mention is made in New York by Temptu studios. It is a cosmetic ink printed on an archival cigarette-like tissue paper. Special cosmetic inks are then used to paint in the 'tattoo.' The result is totally realistic, waterproof, and longlasting (yep, up to 2 weeks!)

"This process was used in Cape Fear on Robert de Niro, Once Were Warriors, and currently on Sean Penn at the end of Dead Man Walking. Also see Bruce Willis' Head in The 12 Monkeys. It was invented by Dr. S. Zuckerman for the film Tattoo (Bruce Dern/Maude Adams in 1981.



“Often we are asked to create a temporary tattoo for someone who wants to ‘test drive a tattoo,’ so they can decide on position, color, before deciding what and where.

“Temptu primarily develops semi-permanent body art. Current interests include working on a ‘safe’ and legal line of tattoo inks, airbrush body art, and Indian Mehandi (henna). I work closely with the New York Body Archive, a strange and wonderful place!”

Roy adds one of comment: “I’m frequently asked about the six-month tattoo you mention in FAQ. East Coast people say it’s available in California. But this is bullsh*t. No such animal!”

B) For some, the easiest thing to do is to simply draw on the skin with a non-toxic marker. In fact, many people who already have tattoos do this to figure out placement and design. If you want it to wash off right away, use something temporary. Crayola’s washable markers work well. If you wanna see if you can live with a design for a couple of days, try a permanent marker such as the Sharpies. They come in basic colors.

C) MEHENDI: In some countries such as India, brides are covered from head to toe with intricate bridalwear (including the face). To try to show off as much of what skin they can show, they paint their hands and forearms with something called henna. Henna, when applied correctly, stains the skin and can last several weeks. Mehendi has become popular with the mainstream, with a number of mehendi tattoo shops cropping up in some cities such as Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Part of the process of getting a tattoo is coming to terms with its permanency. It’s like losing your virginity. You lose it once, and you can’t get it back. You can neck and make out, but it’s not intercourse. If you’re afraid of losing your virginity, you have to come to terms with THAT before you can have sex.

But once you lose your virginity, you forget all about how you feared its loss, and simply enjoy having sex! :)

Debunking of urban folklore Someone asked to confirm a rumour about the possibility of temporary tattoos obtainable by using a tattooing machine very shallowly on the skin, to have the tattoo last only six months or so.



Several professional tattoo artists replied with a very strong *NO*. There is no way to be able to prevent the needles from entering the second layer of skin (the dermis), where tattoo inks normally go. Further, even if the tattoo machine only enters the top layer of skin (the epidermis), you will end up with too much scarring that the tattoo will never really go away.

Considering the time, cost and pain factors, this is not an option--and no professional tattoo artist will want to experiment on you.

The decision process -- making the big plunge: whee can i find a good artist, and what should i look for in tattoo artist?

The bane of the tattoo world is the shadowy, unprofessional person called the "scratcher." A scratcher is somebody who:

- Does not have the proper training in either tattoo art or of running a professional operation;
- Does not know and/or care to use responsible sterilization methods;
- Promises to provide tattooing services for an incredibly low fee, for free, or in exchange for drugs (ack!);
- Chooses not to apprentice through a legitimate tattoo shop because of one excuse or another (but lacks the knowledge one needs to work in or run a professional shop);
- Will hurt you because they don't know what they're doing;
- Will give you a permanent tattoo you will regret for the rest of your life;
- You should stay away with a ten-foot pole.

Never, never, never get work from a scratcher unless you are willing to accept all the hazards listed above.

Of those in a study by Clinton Sanders who regretted their tattoos, more than two-thirds of them regretted their tattoo because of poor quality!

Looking for an artist can be as easy as checking the Yellow Pages, or as complex as checking references, magazine photos. There are a number of ways to find good artists, including (but certainly not limited to):

- Perusing tattoo magazines. While not all tattoo magazines are of the National Geographic quality, the photos will speak for themselves. Some issues highlight specific artists' works; a good way see the type of work someone does. Use the photos in the magazines to compare with those of the artist you are interested in. These magazines have done a lot to show what is *possible*.



Some things to look for in magazines:

- Style (realistic, black & grey work, tribal, etc.)
- Placement on your body
- Ideas for images
- Size in proportion to your body
- Artists whose work you like.

--Attending a tattoo convention. Read the FAQ section on tattoo conventions for more information. You can approach this one of two ways.

You can either go to a shop because someone recommended the artist to you, or you can go in cold. For obvious reasons, you will have a little more information with you if you already know something about the artist. This may make you feel more at ease when going into a shop for the first time.

Bodyart enthusiast Dr. Kai Kristensen, a pathologist and a recently retired lab director of an internationally prestigious medical center in La Jolla (California), says the most important aspects of a good result are to:

- o Choose an experienced, knowledgeable performer who knows about sterilization and avoidance of infection.
- o Avoid infection during the healing process.

With both of those bases covered, healing of either should be non-eventful and the desired appearance should be guaranteed.

What images do you think of when you think of a tattoo?

Do you think of anchors, of roses or of skulls? While these traditional images are still available, you will be pleasantly surprised at the variety you will find today.

There are two basic types of tattoos: Flash, and custom. As you can imagine, “custom” means you have a design you like that you take in with you. “Flash” is the stock designs you see on the walls of the shop.

The main thing to remember is that you’re not required to choose from the selection of flash in a shop--You’re NOT limited to just an anchor, a rose or a skull. Remember however, that these smaller pieces of pre-priced flash are the bread & butter of many shops, since they are proportionately expensive (\$75 for 20 minutes’ work, for example where an artist might charge \$100 an hour for custom work). Also, the number of customers who lay out the big bucks for large, elaborate custom pieces is too small to keep a regular shop in business.



A few of the major styles of tattooing:

BIO-MECHANICAL: A style popularized by illustrator H.R. Giger, who designed the creature from the *Alien* movies. Bio-mechanical work usually involves an anatomical flesh intertwined with some technical drawings of machines. A close relative of this style involves just the biological look of flesh without the mechanical parts.

BLACK & GREY: Refers to the colors used, this style requires the artist to have advanced shading techniques for subtlety.

Celtic: Beautiful, intricate knotwork of the Celts (a hard “k”, NOT a soft “c” like the basketball team). These are much harder for artists to do, and is best done by someone who specializes in it. Also usually done in just black ink.

Oriental: Big, bold pieces of Oriental images (carp, clouds, dragons, etc.) based on the Ukiyo-e woodblock prints of 18th Century Edo-period Japan.

Note: It is fine to call this “Oriental” and not “Asian,” because it references an object and not a person.

PORTRAIT: Images taken from photos, best done by someone who can render realistic photographic images. Usually done in black and grey ink.

Sailor Jerry: Traditional sailor tattoo style made famous by Jerry Collins in Honolulu.

Tribal: Usually bold simple lines, simple patterns. Almost always done with just black ink.

With a good artist working for you, you can get practically any image you’d like. Accomplished artists can render portraits, wildlife, psychedelic and biomechanical styles with impressive results. Your main challenge is to find the artist who can best do the design YOU want.

What kind of colors can i get?

Concerned that you’ll end up with a greenish tattoo with little bits of red or yellow? Worry no more! Today’s inks run the entire gamut--and it would not be terribly sarcastic to take a Pantone color chart with you!

Most tattoo inks are metal salt-based pigments that are not made specifically to be used under the skin, and have not been approved by the FDA for this purpose. The idea is that for most people, these pigments are inert and cause no problems. Some people have been known to have allergic reactions; any reputable artist should be willing to provide you with a small “patch test” of the colors you desire. This is required in the state of Arkansas.

Tattooist Uncle Bud Yates (Pikes Peak Tattooing) says some artists use acrylic-based pigments, which he feels may be more troublesome than the metal-based pigments for some with sensitive skin. Best to ask your artist first.



How to look around in the shop?

Don't let the shop intimidate you when you first walk in. For the uninked, a tattoo shop is intimidating enough. Strange smells, strange sounds. Some shops even try to look intimidating to create a tough-guy feel. Just keep in mind that you're a potential customer. Consider it window shopping.

The first thing you should do is to take a minute to look around. Chances are, you'll encounter some flash (stock illustrations) stapled on the walls. These will most likely lean toward the traditional. Skull and crossbones, roses and the like.

You might also see some signs ("No minors; we ID," "We have sanitary conditions" etc.). These signs will also be indicators of the personality of the shop owner. If the signs seem overly intimidating, patronizing or snobbish, they can be tip-offs of the shop's attitude. Some are very friendly, with plants, aquarium fish, and signs like "Tattooed people come in all colors."

Note: There is no national law regarding the legal age for tattooing. Check with the shop to find out what the local statute regulates.

Asking to see their portofolio

Do NOT be impressed by the flash on the wall. These illustrations are usually purchased from other artists and do not represent the work of your artist. Frankly, anyone with some experience can easily trace the outlines of these illustrations and fill in the colors. What you really need to look at is a book that contains a collection of photos of the artist's work. Go to the counter and ask to see one. If they tell you they don't have one, walk out immediately. You're visiting the shop to commission a piece of art to be permanently illustrated on your skin; for the artist to tell you s/he doesn't have samples in a portfolio is insulting.

What to look for in their portofolio?

When you do look in their portfolio, there are a few things to keep in mind. Do you see any photos of pieces that you recognize in the flash (on the wall, or in a flash book)? If so, how is it rendered in tattoo format? Before anything else, check to see that the lines are clean. Are they well-defined? Straight where they should be; not shaky or blurry? Are the borders all uniform in width? Do the colors seem true? Are they bright? Proportionately correct?

Look at the people in the book. This can be an indicator of the clientele in the shop (besides looking at the ambiance of the shop). Is there a fair mix of women and men in the book? Are they all sporting "biker" tats, or any one particular genre/style?



Again, keep in mind that anyone can stencil an outline of an illustration onto your skin. The skill in the artistry comes in the shading, use of colors and other subtle things that set an artist apart from a simple tattooist.

Do you see anything in the portfolio that is not in the flash? These are the custom pieces that the artists have done, and they should be their crowning glory. How do they look? Do you like what you see? If there is more than one artist working in the shop, and you see some photos you like, make sure to find out which artist did the work.

What kind of questions to ask?

Whenever you ask to see their collection of photos, the person in the shop will hopefully immediately recognize you as someone who knows a little more about tattoos--at least enough not to be satisfied by looking at just the flash. If the shop is not too busy or if the artist is not in the middle of working, they might stand on the other side of the counter to have a conversation with you. This is a wonderful opportunity to ask questions of the artist.

Some reasonable questions to ask in your conversation that shouldn't take too much time for the artist to answer:

What is their favorite style?

If what *you* are looking to get done happens to be their specialty you are in luck; be it tribal, wildlife or whatever.

Is there any one particular subject they like to do?

One artist, without hesitation, told me his favorite was skulls. I would've jumped for joy had that been what I wanted.

How long has the shop been here?

This may be an indicator of the stability of their business. The tat industry in itself fluctuates, but continuity implies business acumen, responsible practices and that they are not a fly-by-night operation.

How long have they been at the shop?

The shop may have been there for 20 years, but the artist may only have been there for a couple of months. If they have been there for what you consider a short period, ask them where they were before.



How long have they been tattooing?

It might not matter so much that the artist has only been there for a short while, if they've been tattooing for several years. They might come from various backgrounds--anywhere from working on friends to having a fine arts degree. This type of information will give you more insight into the artist's attitude as well as aptitude.

Do they get to do much custom work?

This may depend on where the shop is located, but it also depends on how good of an artist they are, and whether they have their own style for which they are known for.

Do they use apprentices at the shop?

It is often difficult for new artists to break into the business, and an apprenticeship is often a very good way to learn not only about tattooing itself, but also about the day-to-day operation of a small business. For artists to take apprenticeships means they're interested in expanding the artform, in giving a new person a break (so to speak) and feeling confident enough about their own skills that they feel they can offer some insight and experience for the new person. This again goes back to the attitude of the artist and the shop.

Don't let the looks of the artist intimidate you. Tattoo artists usually have a lot of tattoos themselves. In fact, I would be somewhat leery of an artist who has *NO* tattoos at all. The main thing is that you need to talk with them and get a feel for what they are like. As you talk with the artist and build a rapport, if you feel comfortable you may want to broach the subject of what you're interested in getting done. Bounce your idea off with the artist and see what they are willing to help you with.

Remember however, that the artist is running a professional business! Be polite--don't linger and overspend your welcome if you don't plan on getting any work done at all. Note: Don't base your decision according to what tattoos you see on the artist--they were not done by that person!

What sorts of things to look for in shop

Looking critically at the shop is as important as choosing your artist. Make sure the place is very clean, make sure the artist uses disposable, single-use needles (that are not re-used after one client), and uses an autoclave for all other equipment. Don't be afraid to ask them, either. A legitimate artist will be glad to show you.



What does the shop look like? What is its ambiance? Does it look like a barber shop, a hair salon, dental office or an art gallery? If you are a nonsmoker, will cigarette smoke bother you? Look for used ashtrays as signs. Do the work areas offer you any privacy? Do they use shower curtains, private booths or shoulder-high room dividers?

Try to go and visit and then come back another day. Don't feel pressured into having to get one right then and there. Try and talk to some people that have experience with the artist (and not the groupies that you'll find hanging around the shop). You should feel comfortable with the artist and you should like him/her. If you don't, then don't get a tattoo.

Make sure the artist is willing to listen to you and respects what you want. Don't go to an artist that has an agenda of what he/she wants to do. The artist may make suggestions, but the final word is always yours.

Finally, make sure you take their business card with you. If the artist you talk to does not have his/her own card, jot down the name on the back, and perhaps some notes to yourself about the shop and the artist.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: What to ask from artists?

It has been brought to my attention that some tattooists have an attitude problem when it comes to potential customers. Tattooists (and piercers!) need to realize that not every person who walks in has to look like a grunged-out leather-wearing biker, or a raven-haired cleopatra-eyed septum-pierced zombie. People from all walks of life may be interested in bodyart.

A potential customer should *NOT* be made to feel out-of-place or ashamed for walking in wearing a business suit, or an LL Bean dress. It is amazing to think that someone with purple hair and eyebrow rings could actually discriminate against someone, but apparently, this seems to be happening.

Just as a customer should expect certain sanitation standards, they should also expect an inviting atmosphere.

Re tattoo shops insured?

Most reputable tattoo shops are insured. The problem is, they're usually insured against premises liability. This means that they have insurance coverage if you fall and hit your head on their floor, but *NOT* if you're unhappy with their work. In the past, the only insurer who would cover the latter was Lloyd's of London, and their rates were apparently very high.



I personally recommend a tip for any work which you are pleased with, or any custom work where the artist spent time drawing up your illustration (since drawing time is usually not included in your price). Nothing brightens up a day for the artist, or helps to build a friendly relationship with your artist more than a generous tip. If you're very happy with the artist and you think you might get more work from them later, TIP!!

There have been heated discussions on rec.arts.bodyart in the past regarding the appropriateness of tipping a shop OWNER. If you feel that an owner does not deserve a tip on top of the price s/he charges you, then A) do not give a tip at all, or B) bring some sort of offering, be it food, flowers or whatever.

Many tattoo artists have told me that the BEST TIP is good word of mouth. If you are happy with your tattoo, show it off to your friends and tell them where you got it done!

How should i act when i get in that chair?

Once you have settled on a design and a price that you and your artist agree on, the work will either begin right then, or you will be asked to come back for a later appointment (e.g. if the artist has another client coming in in 15 minutes).

Once you're in that chair, what can you expect? Most likely, the artist will begin the long process of preparing for your work. This is especially true if the artist is going to do a custom design that you brought in. First, the design will have to be worked on. Most artists will play around with the design on paper first, although some artists will do it freehand. "Freehand" means the artist takes an ink pen to hand and begins drawing a design on your skin without the use of a stencil (NOT where the artist begins work with the tattooing machine immediately--the artist, no matter how good, still needs to envision how the work will look on your skin--proportion, placement, etc.).

When you and the artist are happy with the design, the artist might outline the design with a piece of carbon paper, or use an old-fashioned copy machine to get a working copy of it. This would be when the artist would properly size the design. The artist will then clean your skin where the work will be done (probably an alcohol or antiseptic rub), and will swipe your skin with an "adhesive," which is usually Speed Stick deodorant (for some reason *I* haven't seen any other brands). The artist will then put the carbon side of the design directly on your skin. When the paper is lifted, ta-da! A carbon line drawing of the design should appear on your skin!



The artist will probably let you look in a mirror to make sure you are happy with the design and the placement. Once this is agreed upon, the artist will then begin putting the supplies out.

At this point, your artist should be doing things like dispensing various colors of ink into little disposable wells, and rigging a new set of needles into the tattoo machine. At this time, you will probably try to look cool by looking around the studio walls or occasionally looking to see what your artist is doing. Your artist might have a radio playing, which will help distract you a little.

At this point, it is best for you to try and relax. You can ask the artists about some things, like the colors of the ink. Depending on the work you are getting, the artist will need to mix some colors, for example. You're probably somewhat nervous, but excited at the same time because you're actually gonna get a real tattoo! Whether you realize it or not, your body is going through quite an adrenalin rush. Try to remain calm and not too anxious. Your hyped-up condition and your anxiety about the anticipated pain of your experience by themselves may trigger a fainting spell. It will help if you are not there on an empty stomach. Get a bite to eat about an hour or two before you go in for your session. Having hard candy or some juice on hand during the session is also recommended.

Just relax and try to stay calm. For women, the experience of anxious anticipation is similar to a pelvic exam at an OB/GYN, where you are more nervous about it while waiting for the doctor as you lie prone on the examining table, feet in the stirrups. Just as most exams aren't painful or really all that bad, neither is tattooing.

Bzzzzztttt....The artist starts up the machine, dips the needle into the ink and starts to work toward your skin! Aaaaaahhhhh!!! Will it hurt? Will it hurt? Grit your teeth! Hang tight!...

Ooohhhhhhhh! It *does* hurt! Ow! Ow! Ow! I'm okay, I'm okay, this is fine, it's not that bad. I can grit my teeth. Grit, grit, grit. Try to smile a bit. My teeth are gritting, anyway. Oh, I hope this pain doesn't stay like this!! Breathe. Don't forget to breathe. Relax. Relax. Relax. Okay there, that's better. Not so painful. I can handle it. Yeah--look at all the tattoos HE's got on his arms. I can handle it, too. Yeah.

...The most painful part of the process will pass in a couple of minutes, after which the area will feel abuzz with electricity and warmth. Just try to relax and breathe deeply--enjoy the one-of-a-kind experience that you're feeling. Oftentimes, you end up clenching your jaws, grinding your teeth or grasping the chair with your white-knuckled hands. But once you pass the first couple of minutes, you'll feel silly for having worried about it so much.



If you still feel uncomfortable after a few minutes, it may be because you're sitting in an uncomfortable position. See if you can get into a more comfortable, reclining position--but make sure to ask the artist first before you try to move.

Some people try to distract themselves by trying to talk with the artist. This is kind of like with hair stylists--some stylists just love to gab and gab (just ask them an open-ended question), while some stylists would rather concentrate and not screw up your hairdo. Same with tattoo artists. While some will like to "talk story" with you, others would rather concentrate on the work you're paying them to do. After all, their job, income, and reputation are on the line when they have the tattooing machine to your skin. Often, they'll talk during easy parts, and less during complex work. Just go with the flow and not worry about it.

The only thing I don't particularly prefer is if there's a lot of traffic walking around in the studio and the artist has to keep talking to them (either potential clients or tattoo groupies). For this reason, a cubicle or dividing partition is a nice option for privacy.

Most people can sit through over an hour of work, but if you get uncomfortable, just ask your artist if you can take a break. If you feel woozy, you might consider bringing some candy with you to give you a little lift, or some water to drink.

Where on my body should i get a tattoo?

This may seem VERY trivial, since the answer can be "anywhere you please!" The ONLY places you cannot technically get permanent tattoos are your hair, teeth and nails (even the cornea used to be tattooed years ago for medical purposes). Interestingly, women and men tend to get tattoos in different locations. This, according to sociologist Clinton Sanders, is because men and women get tattoos for different reasons. Men, he says, get them to show others, while women get them for the sake of decorating their body--and often place them where they can't normally be seen, so that it doesn't prompt comments about her "reputation." However for the sake of this FAQ, the following is a short list of areas to get inked. I am included the statistics from Clinton Sanders' study on the body location of the first tattoo for men and women as well (there were 111 men in his survey group and 52 women).

Head:

The "head" here refers mostly to the area where your hair grows. You'll need to shave the area for the tat to be most visible. If you need to hide your tat, you can grow your hair out. Areas more commonly inked are the sides of the head (above the ears), and above the nape of the neck in the back. There are people who have their entire heads inked. I am told that the tattooing process vibrates your skull!



Sides of neck (nape).

Back of neck: I've seen some tribal pieces, and bats done on the back of the neck. You'll need to keep your hair short or tied up to keep it visible.

Face:

Various areas possible. Facial tattoos could fall into the cosmetic or standard categories. Cosmetic would include darkening of eyebrows, eyelining, liplining, etc. Getting a tat on the face is serious business and crosses a portal because people will never look at you the same way.

Upper chest:

One of the standard areas for tattoos for both men and women. Allows lots of flat area in which to get a fairly large piece. One of the areas where you can choose to get symmetrically inked on both sides. (Men: 5%, women: 35%--chest & breast combined)

Breasts (women):

Used to be trendy to get a tiny tat on the breast. Women (particularly larger breast-ed ones) need to be careful about eventual sagging of the skin in the area. Don't get a tat that will look silly when it starts to stretch (like a round smiley face that'll turn into an oblong frown).

Nipples:

Usually the artist leaves the nipples alone--the omission of ink tends not to be so noticeable. There HAS been work done with tattooing a facsimile of a nipple onto a breast in reconstructive surgery for those who have lost their nipples, tho--for aesthetic and self-esteem purposes.

Rib cage:

Can be rather painful because of all the ribs you work over. However it offers a fairly large area, and can be incorporated into a major back piece, wrapping around toward the front.

Stomach/Abdomen:

Some people choose not to get work done on their stomachs for a couple of reasons. Area is difficult to work on because there's no solid backing to hold the skin down. It is a sensitive area that may feel uncomfortable. The tat may look horrible after your metabolism slows down and you develop a - er-- "beer gut." (Men: Less than 5%, women: 14%)



Genitals:

Yes, some people do get inked in their genital area. The idea may sound very painful, but it's really not all that bad. However, do consider that, due to the stretchiness of the skin and the amount of movement the area experiences, it's not really possible to do anything with a lot of fine detail. And no, the penis does not have to be erect during tattooing, although a tattoo artist I know who has done several penis tattoos said that he did have one customer who had a full erection the whole time. The only female genital tattoo I've seen (inner labia, I think) was in *_Modern Primitives_*, and it looked rather blurry. Note: Some artists refuse to do genitals. (Men: 0%; women: 5 %)

Thighs/hips:

A popular area for women to get larger pieces (often extending from the hip area). Shows well with a bathing suit but easily concealable in modest shorts. The entire area of skin around your thighs is bigger than your back, so you can get quite a bit of work done. (Men: 3%; women: 10%)

Calves:

Nice area to get a standard size (2" x 2"). However if you have very hairy legs, it may cut down on the visibility somewhat. (Men: 7%; women: 8%. Category simply listed as leg/foot)

Ankles:

Currently trendy. I think you have to have an ankle tat before you can go to the Eileen Ford Agency with your modeling portfolio. :) You can either get a spot piece on the inner or outer ankle, or get something that goes around in a band. Vines and other vegetation seem popular (pumpkins, anyone?)

Feet:

I've seen some incredible footwork (pun intended) in some of the tat magazines. Concealable with shoes. Probably don't have as much wear and tear as hands so you might get less blurring and color loss. This however, is the TOPS of your feet. You will have trouble retaining a tattoo on the bottom of your feet.

Armpits:

Usually reserved for those who want to get full coverage around the arm and chest area, & need the armpits filled. Probably not strongly recommended for the highly ticklish.



Inner arms:

A more unusual location than the outer upper arm area, this area is often not easily visible. Be careful if your genes are prone to “bat wing” flab, however.

Forearms:

Popeye sported his anchor on his forearm. Probably not as popular as the upper arm but common just the same. You can have your upper arm “sleeve” extend down for a full sleeve. For an example, check out the heavy metal veejay on MTV (who has a nose pierce, BTW).

Wrists:

Janis Joplin had a dainty tat on her wrist...easily concealable with a watch.

Hands (fingers and palms):

Some artists don't do hands because the ink will have a tendency to blur or fade easily. Consider that you probably move your hands the most out of your entire body. A friend of mine had a multi-colored tat on his finger by Ed Hardy (who cringed upon hearing about where my friend wanted it), that is only several years old and is now barely noticeable. Some people want to substitute their wedding bands with tat bands. Your palm doesn't retain ink well--if you can find an artist who will do it, you can expect it to be a rather basic line, and that it will not last too long. Perhaps just matching tats someplace else would be okay?

Shoulder blades:

The back shoulder blade area is another popular spot for women, who can show off the work with a bathing suit or tank top, but cover it up with regular clothes. If this is the case, be particularly careful with sun because you're not gonna be wearing that unless it's warm & sunny. It's a “safe” place--but may get in the way if you decide to commit yourself to a large back piece. (Men: 15%, women: 15%. Category listed as backs/shoulder)

Back:

You can get any part of your back done, or find yourself an artist you really like, and save your money for a “back piece” that encompasses your entire back. Expect to pay several thousand dollars for a full back piece (not to mention many tat sessions).

Buttocks:

Again, beware of potential sagging in the area.



Sanitation

- 1.1 Can I get infectious diseases from tattoo needles?
- 1.2 What to look for in a sanitary shop environment.
- 1.3 Can I get AIDS from tattooing?
- 1.4 Can my tattoos get infected?
- 1.5 How to look for sterilization
- 1.6 Are there any medical conditions that will preclude me from getting a tattoo?
- 1.7 What is the Alliance of Professional Tattooists?
- 1.8 Should I get a vaccination shot against hepatitis?



1.1 Can I get infectious diseases from tattoo needles?

There has been some concern recently regarding transmittable diseases (particularly Hepatitis-B and AIDS [HIV]) and tattoo shops. Just as in a dentist's office, as long as the area is strictly sanitized, your chances for infection will be greatly reduced.

Note: If you plan on getting lots of bodyart (pierces or tattoos), you should seriously consider getting immunized against Hepatitis-B. Hep-B is a much more serious concern than HIV as the virus is much more virulent and easier to catch.

1.2 What to look for in a sanitary shop environment.

The current popularity of tattooing and body piercing has also brought on an increase in potentially hazardous conditions. For this reason, I am posting the following guideline of what to look out for (in this situation, "artist" refers to both tattooists and piercers):

- Lighting: The area must be well-lit so the artist can see what s/he is doing.
- Counter and floor space should be lightly colored, preferably white so dirt shows up easier.
- The spray bottle the artist uses on your skin should be disinfected between customers, or some kind of protective film such as Saran Wrap should be used.
- Disposing needles: All needles must be either discarded after EACH use (or at least with each new customer), or autoclaved. Many body piercers operate out of small booths and may not have spent money for an autoclave, in which they **MUST** dispose of each needle. **NO EXCEPTIONS.** Reusing piercing needles is equivalent to sharing IV drugs with strangers.
- Needles touching other things: The needles, once open from their sanitary packages, must not be placed on unsanitized surfaces. The piercer should **NOT** set the needle down on the table, or, heaven forbid, **DROP THE NEEDLE ON THE FLOOR!!!** If this happens, insist they open a new needle.
- Gloves: The artist must wash their hands prior to putting on their gloves, preferably with an antibacterial/antiseptic solution. Once they put their gloves on, they should not touch anything other than your skin, the needle, and the jewelry. They should not be filling out receipts beforehand, or answering the phone--unless these have been wiped clean beforehand.



- Is there a sink separate from the bathroom sink? -Does the artist use a disposable razor when shaving skin?
- The Speed Stick used as an adhesive for the tattoo pattern should not be directly applied to the skin, but applied first to a tissue which can then be used on the skin.
- Autoclaves should be inspected regularly.
- Sterile materials should be stored in sealed containers away from things that could cause body fluids or ink to splash on them -The palette that holds the ink caps should be covered with Saran Wrap -After tattooing, the ink caps should be discarded and the ink not reused or poured back into the bottles

Be particularly wary of “outdoor fair booths.” While many are run by caring, experienced artists, these booths allow fly-by-night operators to make some fast money and disappear. If you don’t know the artist, spend time watching them work on others first. Are they reusing needles? Do they use needles that have dropped on the ground?

1.3 Can I get AIDS from tattooing?

IMPORTANT NOTE: This section refers to tattooing specifically, and not to other forms of bodyart. Some, such as piercing and cutting, require the breaking of the client’s skin to a deeper level than what is achieved with a modern tattoo machine.

This section on AIDS & Tattooing has been contributed by Nick “Buccaneer” pirate@netcom.com Baban , who studied at the Univ. of Michigan School of Public Health, Dept. of Epidemiology. He spent the summer researching AIDS and IV drug use in NYC. “I’m not an expert, but I consider myself knowledgeable. Any further questions about AIDS can be e-mailed to me.”

Obviously there is some concern about AIDS and tattooing because when you get a tattoo, you bleed. But the mechanism of transmission needs to be better understood.

AIDS is transmitted by intimate contact with bodily fluids, blood and semen being the most common. Intimate contact means that the fluid carrying the AIDS virus (HIV) enters into your system.



Injection drug users (IDUs) use hollow medical syringes and needles to inject drugs directly into their bloodstream. It is common practice to withdraw a little blood back into the syringe to delay the onset of the high. When needles are passed from IDU to IDU and reused without sterilization, some of that blood remains in the syringe and is passed on to the next user. If infected blood is passed, the recipient can become infected with HIV, which leads to AIDS.

Tattooing is VERY different from injecting drugs. The needles used in tattooing are not hollow. They do, however, travel back and forth through a hollow tube that acts as an ink reservoir. The tip of the tube is dipped into the ink, which draws a little into the tube. As the needle withdraws into the tube, it gets coated with ink. When it comes forward, it pierces your skin and deposits the ink. You then bleed a little through the needle hole. This happens several hundred times a second.

You are only at risk of infection if you come in contact with infected blood. Since it is only **your** skin that is being pierced during the tattooing process, only **your** blood is being exposed. This means that the only person at greater risk is the artist, because s/he is the only one coming in contact with someone else's (potentially infected) blood. This is why reputable (and sane) tattoo artist wears surgical gloves while working.

Another source of infection is through the use of infected tools. **This is why it is IMPERATIVE that you make sure your tattoo artist uses sterile equipment.** Needles and tubes need to be autoclaved before EACH AND EVERY time they are used. Ink should come from separate cups and not directly from the bottle. Any leftover ink should be disposed of and not reused under ANY circumstances.

The key to HIV transmission is **transfer of bodily fluids.** Evidence indicates that infection may require a (relatively) substantial amount of fluid to be passed. A pin prick almost certainly won't do it. HIV is also a very fragile virus that cannot survive long outside the human body, and is very easy to kill via autoclaving. (I have heard of using bleach to sterilize needles. While bleach is an effective HIV killer, I'm not sure of the procedures for cleaning the equipment after bleach cleaning. As I personally have no desire to have bleach put under my skin, I go with autoclaving as the proper way to sterilize).

If your tattooer maintains sterile conditions and procedures, there is almost no risk of infection. I say "almost" because any risk, no matter how miniscule, is still a risk and must be recognized. That said, I am the proud owner of a Jolly Roger tattoo on my right shoulder because I knew my tattooist and knew he had sterile conditions.



1.4 Can my tattoos get infected?

Not as long as you take care of your new tat. There is a section in the FAQ that covers healing methods in depth. Some people have trouble healing tattoos with colors they are allergic to. If it gets infected and refuses to heal after a few days of using a topical antibiotic, you may want to check with a doctor. Keep in mind this assumes you are a healthy individual without any condition that suppresses your immune system.

1.5 How to look for sterilization

Check out the shop thoroughly. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security by a clean look. If the needles are not disposed of after each person, then it **MUST** be "autoclaved." Autoclaving is a process that pressurizes the instruments and kills any virus or bacteria that might transmit viruses or bacteria. My dentist has two autoclaves--one gas and one steam--both pressurizing down to 250fsw. He also has spore samples that he autoclaves and sends to a pathology lab to make sure the machines are working.

Ask the artist how they clean their needles. If they don't say they autoclave, you are taking your risks. If they say they do, ask to see their machine. Note that in some states, autoclaving is required by law. Other common-sense types of things include throwing out the ink after each customer. Make sure the artists have small wells for each ink color that they dispense from a larger container, and that these are thrown out after work on you is done. Compare the conditions of the shop to that of your dentist--does the artist wear gloves? Are the areas sprayed clean?

According to the Navy Environmental Health Center Medical Corps in Norfolk, Virginia, each year, a few cases of Hep-B are reported in people who've gotten tattoos within the last two months, but they have not been able to trace the disease back to its source, nor attribute it directly to the tattoo.

Becky Fenton AS.RAF@forsythe.stanford.edu says: "I spoke with a disease infection specialist at Kaiser [Permanente--US West Coast health care system], and there have not been any incidents (as of 1990) of HIV being spread *to* a recipient of a tattoo. If you think about it, the tattooist is much more at risk, as s/he has to touch the customer's blood.



David Zinner dzinner@desire.wright.edu notes that a blanket statement regarding the use of autoclaves could be misleading. While an autoclave will kill the HIV virus, it is not because of the efficacy of the 'clave, but because of the weakness of that particular virus. Far more insidious is Hepatitis, which is more tenacious, and which a 'clave does not always kill. He has gotten all of his info from CDC, by the way.

The irony, he says, is that now virtually anyone can afford a 'clave, because many hospitals are selling them secondhand for a very good price, and switching either to disposables, or purchasing dry-heat or chemical sterilizers. Chemical is the best rated, and he says that his friend's business has increased because of the precautions he takes.

In response to David's well-founded concern, Dr. Milton Diamond diamond@hawaii.edu from the UH School of Medicine who has been researching sexuality for 30 years, says: Hepatitis is easier to transmit than HIV but all the bugs will be killed IF the autoclave is run properly (i.e., set hot enough & long enough). Some instruments can not, however, be autoclaved since they cant take the heat. These have to be sterilized with viracides, "bug"acides and so forth. In any case, here in the States, EVERYONE should be using disposable needles.

The chemical bath is only as effective as how fresh is it, how concentrated, what chemicals, how "dirty" or contaminated the instruments, how long in the bath, which particular bug is under attack, etc. It is not the device, autoclave or chemical bath, that is as important as the operator. There are many different bugs out there. HIV may be one of the most deadly and Hep among the more easily transmitted but many others have to be considered (including Chlamydia, the infection rate of which is 20%!) and "he who aims at one, hits one." "Mo betta aim fo dem all." If the artist or piercer is conscientious, reliable and knowledgeable, either device could serve. Again my general rule still stands: "EVERYONE should be using disposable needles."

Dr. Kai Kristensen tattoodoc@jps.net says: The needles that push the ink into the skin (below the epidermis or outer covering and into the mid-dermis or support structure under the epidermis) can transmit disease UNLESS STERILE TO BEGIN WITH. When they have been used on you, whatever bugs you carry in your blood can be transmitted to the next person. The most commonly transmitted disease by needlestick is Hepatitis B (and C). Clearly AIDS could be transmitted even though not documented yet to my knowledge.



The skin should be cleaned with antibacterial soap and water and scrubbing before the procedure to lessen the normal population of germs on the hide. Alcohol doesn't do much but tends to degrease and cool, so no harm but no substitute.

USE OF DISPOSABLE GLOVES: A conscientious, professional tattooist or piercer will often go through A DOZEN DISPOSABLE GLOVES on one client. Gloves **SHOULD** be changed every time they touch unsanitized items with their gloves. If you see that the artist does not change gloves after answering the phone, they are not being sanitary. Marginally acceptable is if they pick up the phone (or other objects, such as pencil) with a tissue. Optimally, they should use a new pair of gloves after each potential contamination.

1.6 Are there any medical conditions that will preclude me from getting a tattoo?

If you have hemophilia. There is even a case of a man who was HIV positive who got a tattoo--if you are HIV+ however, you will want to inform the artist, since it's the artist that is at more risk than you. [In the case of the HIV+ man, he was John Baldetta, a former nursing assistant at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, who got a tat on his forearm that said "HIV Positive." He was suspended for three days without pay and told he could return if he covered up the tat. He refused and was subsequently fired, although he was not an RN and was not doing anything that would put patients at risk.]

However, it is best to let the artist know if you have ANY medical condition, such as diabetes or epilepsy, in case of an emergency.

If you have multiple allergies, you can always have the artist do a "patch test" on you with the colors you want prior to returning for a regular tattoo. This is similar to patch tests done for perms and hair coloring, and will help you determine if your body will react to some of the pigments.

Also, it is generally not considered a good idea to tattoo pregnant women.

1.7 What is the Alliance of Professional Tattooists?

This section was contributed by Pat Sinatra, a professional tattoo artist and vice president of the organization:

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists (APT), Inc. is a professional standards organization that was established in March 1992 and officially incorporated in June '92 as a non-profit organization (contributions, fees and educational materials are tax deductible).



Their activities:

- Continuing education to artists
- Offers accurate, up-to-date information about communicable diseases through seminars
- Is interested in preserving tattooing as an artform
- Monitors legislative activity to prevent over-regulation (controlled or banned)
- Believes in keeping the art of tattooing safe and legal through education, knowledge and awareness
- Offers reliable information to tattoo lovers about safe tattoo practices to ensure your health.

Headquartered in Maryland, its international membership has expanded from the US to Canada, Europe and other countries. They are currently establishing state chapters with state directors.

Their nine-hour seminar entitled, “Preventing Disease Transmission in Tattooing,” is taught by APT secretary, Dr. Kris Sperry (Fulton County Medical Examiner, involved with tattooing for over 10 years). Designed in 1988 to educate health care workers (including tattooists) in the prevention of infection and the implementation of professional standards, the program was specifically redesigned in 1991-1992 for the needs of the tattooist and is the standard for APT members. Since the 1991 Blood-borne Pathogens Rule, APT, Inc. has designed this manual for tattooists.

PDTT is presented in various locations throughout the country at a one time fee of \$125.00 (APT members) or \$300.00 (non-members). This course is open to the Professional and Associate levels only. Members are required to complete this seminar within two years after initial application.

While we have noted that many individuals are promoting videos on this subject, OSHA (the US Occupational Safety & Health Association that regulates work-environment safety) says that an infection control program cannot be taught by video, but by an on-site knowledgeable individual on site.

OSHA believes that the in-person interaction between instructor and student is vital to the education of this serious subject, and that individual questions regarding infection control, universal precautions, disease transmission, pathology, etc., must be answered by a knowledgeable, credible instructor such as Dr. Sperry.



1.8 Should I get a vaccination shot against hepatitis?

Without everyone worried about HIV transmission, it is easy to forget that hepatitis (specifically hep-B) is a much stronger and virulent virus to worry about. Fortunately, you **can** get protection against both hepatitis A and B! Check with your health insurance to see if it's covered--otherwise, you might have to shell out \$200 or so for both. There are two shots (injected a month apart) for hep-A, and three shots (injected over the course of six months) for hep-B. You are strongly urged to get protected if you are planning to get tattoos **OR** pierces on a regular basis.

As a warning however, note that a very small percentage of individuals react negatively to Hepatitis B vaccines, and could actually become ill from the vaccines themselves. If you are contemplating getting vaccinated for Hep B, talk to your health care professional to weigh the risks against the benefits. Note: Not all health care professionals are apprised of the most current statistics on the adverse effects of Hep B vaccines.



Care of new Tattoos

- 1.1 General Advice From A Medical Doctor
- 1.2 Common Misconceptions With No Basis In Reality
- 1.3 What Are Some Bad Things For My New Tattoo?
- 1.4 It Is True That Suntanning To A Considerable Extent Not Only Damages Your Skin But Fades The Tattoos?
- 1.5 How Do I Care For My New Tattoo?
- 1.6 Minimal Moisturizer Method Ancient Art Tattoo, (Orlando, FLA)
- 1.7 Pat-With-Listerine Method From Tattoos Unlimited (London, Canada)
- 1.8 The Wait-24-Hours-To-Take-Off-Dressing Method From Joker's Wild (London, Canada)
- 1.9 The Coconut-Oil-Itch-Relief Method From Blue Dragon Tattoos (London, Canada)
- 1.10 The Huck Spalding Method From Huck Spalding's "Tattooing A To Z"
- 1.11 The Noxzema Method From Lance Bailey



1.1 General Advice From A Medical Doctor

After the session, the best treatment is simply that which one would give a bad sunburn. For the first few hours (or overnight) leave on the protective dressing supplied. After removing that dressing, clean gently with soap and water and apply a thin film of antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin or any of the triple antibiotic ointments available over the counter). That can be repeated during the day for comfort and sticky clothing. The process is repeated the second and third days. After that, keeping the area clean on a daily basis and (if you wish) lightly lubricated with some vaseline to minimize crusting also helps minimize the itch. Plastic surgeons keep wounds clean and moist for least scar formation. Do not go swimming for the first day or two after tattooing.

1.2 Common Misconceptions With No Basis In Reality:

1. “Vaseline makes a tattoo faded”. The ink is underneath the epidermis and the outer layer of dermis. There’s NO WAY that vaseline can get down through the epidermis to draw out any of the ink.

2. “Swimming makes a tattoo faded”. For the same reason as the above, pool chlorine does not get to the ink to fade it. Common sense precautions include not swimming in a public pool with a raw sore, such as a new tattoo while oozing or completely raw. After the first 2 days, the surface over the tattoo is impervious and (from personal experience as well as science background) it is OK to swim.

1.3 What Are Some Bad Things For My New Tattoo?

SAUNA OR STEAMROOM

Once it is healed, there is very little that will screw up a tattoo. The one exception is prolonged exposure to sunlight. (the other is scarring, but that is patently obvious).

SUNLIGHT

Well, unfortunately it is. The newer inks are better at resisting fading but whatever you do, if you spend lots of time in bright sunlight your tats will fade (over a lifetime, not over a week). Best to try and keep them out of bright sunlight. No one wants to become a cave dweller just to keep their tats looking good, so just use some common sense. Think of your tat as an investment--slather on that sunblock so it doesn’t turn into a dark blob.

Our culture has erroneously labeled the tan as healthy. Did you know that your tan is your skin’s way of dealing with the damage caused by the sun? It’s like the formation of a scab when you have a cut. You will pay for your years of sun exposure when you are in your 40s and 50s.



Leathery, wrinkled, dry skin with freckles and liver spots. Melanoma. Skin cancer. Regular visits to the dermatologist. Like I say, “There’s no such thing as a healthy tan!” Take it from a Hawaii local! I’ve seen my share of melanoma here, and they’re not even from surfers or beach bunnies!

Some people have gotten angry at me about this, telling me that they have a seasonal disorder that requires them to get some sun. A little bit of sun is okay (and it gives you a dose of Vitamin D). But all you need is a few minutes’ worth.

Tanning booths are not good for you! They are not regulated by the FDA, and the staff that work at these salons have been known to give out patently false information. Many salon operators will suggest dosages far exceeding industry recommendations, and the FDA would actually prefer that these booths be banned altogether. Do not believe the salon operators who tell you there is NO damage caused by their UV rays. There are indications that tanning booths emit rays that cause the type of damage that only shows up years later, when it is difficult to fault any one operator. Their industry motto is “tan safe.” There is no such thing as a SAFE tan, folks. Sorry.

1.4 It Is True That Suntanning To A Considerable Extent Not Only Damages Your Skin But Fades The Tattoos?

The UV light rays that damage skin can get below the outermost surface of the skin (that’s why skin cancers are promoted by excess suntanning).

The following is information about sun care and sunblock:

1. Try to use products that do not clog your pores. If your sunblock makes you break out or feel itchy, this may be the cause.
2. Avoid sunblock containing PABA, apparently found to be carcinogenic.
3. “SPF” stands for Sun Protection Factor. If you can normally stay out for ten minutes without getting sunburnt, then an SPF 2 should protect you for 20 minutes, an SPF 6 for an hour, and so on. HOWEVER, this does *NOT* mean an SPF 30 will let you stay out for five hours with just one coat. Keep your exposure limited to the minimum amounts, and always use an extra strong sunblock with at least SPF 30 for your tattoo.
4. “Waterproof” and “sweatproof” sunblocks protect you while in the water. However, reflections from the water add to your exposure. Make sure you use a high SPF number, and always re-apply your sunblock when coming out of the water.



5. Sunblock is not just for the beach! Make it a habit to carry one with you during the sunnier months so you can protect your tattoo always! The Watermelon Stick from the Body Shop is nice and portable, but in a pinch, a tube of lip balm (Blistik, etc.) will work, as long as it has an SPF. Dab a bit on your tattoo whenever you will be outside.

1.5 How Do I Care For My New Tattoo?

The artist that did your tattoo will have something very definite to say about the care of your new tattoo, and it is probably a good idea to listen to him/her. Many shops will have an information sheet listing care instructions.

The information provided in this section may or may not be the same method your artist offers. Regardless, there are three things to remember about caring for your new tattoo:

- Moisturize it
- Don't overmoisturize it
- And whatever you do, Don't pick your onion peel scabs!

Basically, as long as you follow these three points, you will be okay. However as people get more tattoos, they begin trying out slightly different methods. I have included several examples, and not all of them will work on everybody. Some people will find that they are allergic to some products. For example, I have always had a problem with Noxzema skin cream, which makes me break out with water-filled pimple-like things on my skin.

How do you know which method is best for you? It depends on the type of skin you have, and how sensitive it is. I suggest you try a patch test on your skin for a week or so to see if you react to the ingredients.

Having said that, I have personally discovered a very nice "new tattoo kit" that I now use whenever I go to get a tattoo. And the added benefit was that I discovered this "kit" in a sample size travel set, which I can easily pack in my travel bag.

The set that I now use is the Johnson's baby product line. The kit includes baby powder, baby shampoo, diaper rash ointment, baby lotion, baby bath, and a bonus (in this case, a baby bib). I don't need the baby bib, and the shampoo is just an added bonus for me. However, this is how I use the kit, especially when I'm getting the tattoo in another city:



Baby powder: I sprinkle a liberal amount on the hotel bed sheets to prevent my skin from sticking to the sheet.

Baby bath: A fruity-smelling liquid soap, it's very mild and has minimal lathering. I pour a bit on my hand, rub into a light lather and wash the tattoo this way. It rinses off very easily with non-pressurized water, minimizing the risk of losing scabs.

Baby lotion: The Johnson's brand feels non-greasy. *MY* skin does not like a layer of oily lotion, and until this, I used to pay lots of money for oil-free Oil of Olay (is that a contradiction in terms?). Goes on very lightly but keeps the skin moist.

Diaper rash ointment: Zinc oxide-based, I use this thick, non-greasy ointment on certain "contact spots" of my tattoo that may rub against clothes (i.e. bra strap, waist band).

I've found this travel kit selling for \$2-\$3 (US), and the small sizes work out just right for a smaller tattoo (no larger than 8"x8"). You *MIGHT* smell like a clean baby, though!

Other people will recommend different ointments and lotions. Some people swear by Tea Tree Oil (toner) from the Body Shop for its healing qualities. Others like A&D Ointment (marketed for diaper rash, I find it somewhat greasy), and the cheapest is probably regular Vaseline Intensive Care. If you live in a dry area and you're prone to use a lot of lotion anyway, the last one, in a large pump bottle, may be your best bargain.

This section lists treatments to give you an idea of the breadth of suggestions offered. These have been given "titles" using some unique facet of the method, and is thus named only for the sake of convenience. These methods are NOT actually called these. Each set of instructions is followed by commentary. Special thanks to Lance Bailey for this section.

1.6 Minimal Moisturizer Method Ancient Art Tattoo, (Orlando, FLA)

Ancient Art puts a heap of vaseline on the new tattoo and then bandages up the whole thing, they give you these instructions:



Tattoo Care Instructions:

1. Remove bandaid in 18 hrs.
2. Wash tattoo immediately, with soap and water When washing off the tattoo, there should be old ink & some body fluids. At this state there is little that can harm the tattoo.
3. When skin feels like normal wet skin, pat dry.
4. Put nothing on the tattoo for 3 days.
5. From the 4th day, apply the *tiniest* amount of lotion possible once a day to keep it from drying out completely; gently work it in. (Mike suggests a drop for a 1"x4" piece).
6. Do not get the tattoo wet; moisture is your enemy.
7. Do not permit sun on tattoo.
8. Do not get the tattoo wet; moisture is your enemy.
9. Scabbing may or may not occur. Scabbing is normal. Do not pick scab.
10. Do not get the tattoo wet; moisture is your enemy.

His strongest advice: "MOISTURE IS THE TATTOO'S ENEMY".

On using Vaseline: Neosporin is Vaseline-based, & doesn't hurt.

On using Neosporin: Not really necessary, but it doesn't hurt. Strong warning: Never let the shower directly hit the tattoo.

This procedure is how I healed the four I got at Ancient Art and they seem to be the slowest to heal. After 2.5 weeks, they still have scabs. sigh.

Lance Bailey says: I used to go to great lengths to keep my tattoos moist while healing. But now, looking at the ink I healed then, and other art which is not much older but healed without all the moisture, I see that the ones where I kept it real moist to prevent any scabs are a lot fainter--grey where the others are still black. I quite literally drew a lot of the ink out of the piece. Yes, it is important to keep the tattoo from drying out, but a scab is part of the normal healing process, and trying to fool mother nature is risking trouble. Your mileage will of course vary.

1.7 Pat-With-Listerine Method From Tattoos Unlimited (London, Canada)

1. Change your bandage within two hours, wash hands before touching tattoo,
2. Clean tattoo with soap and water, pat w/ Listerine for a few minutes.
3. Apply Polysporin Ointment & bandage. Repeat this process 4 times a day until tattoo is healed.



This is how I healed the first four or five tattoos. The theory is that by keeping it covered with ointment, you don't form a scab -- and no scab means no scab problems. UNFORTUNATELY, this method also draws out a lot of the ink and can result in a pretty pale tattoo. sigh. I would not recommend this method for a good final result, although it can heal up a tattoo in as little as a four days if you use Vitamin E and Polysporin.

1.8 The Wait-24-Hours-To-Take-Off-Dressing Method From Joker's Wild (London, Canada)

1. Remove bandage after 24 hours while you are showering.
2. Use a mild soap then pat dry
3. Allow tattoo to dry for 24 hours.
4. Apply supplied healing lotion 4 times a day. Do not use anything else on tattoo then the supplied cream.
5. When using the healing cream, use it sparingly, you want to moisten your tattoo, not soak it.
6. Do not soak your tattoo in the bath for 2 weeks.
7. Do not swim in chlorinated water for 2 weeks
8. Do not tan your tattoo for 2 weeks
9. If your tattoo does happen to scab, do not pick.

Roland at Joker's Wild (no longer there) also recommended protecting the new tattoo from the shower. Since all of mine are on the lower leg, he suggested putting a bag over it which is a bit of a pain, but probably worth it.

This is how I healed the 3" X 6" piece on the front of my shin with the exception that I washed it gently at least twice a day to clean off old ointment. I am very pleased with the result.

1.9 The Coconut-Oil-Itch-Relief Method From Blue Dragon Tattoos (London, Canada)

For effortless healing of your new tattoo please follow these directions carefully.

1. VERY IMPORTANT. Leave sterile dressing covering tattooed area for a minimum of 2 hours.
2. If desired, dressing can remain on tattoo for a maximum of 24 hours.
3. After removing dressing (non-stick), gently wash tattooed area with soap, pat dry with a clean towel.
4. Apply Polysporin twice daily until healed. Usually 3-6 days.
5. Refrain from picking or scratching tattoo during the healing process. Damaging the light scab formation will result in poor colors in your tattoo. If tattoo irritates, apply a slight smear of pure coconut oil.



I have never tried this method; the owner of Blue Dragon and I don't seem to get along. Pity because one of my favorite artists now works there.

1.10 The Huck Spalding Method From Huck Spalding's "Tattooing A To Z"

1. Bandage(*) should stay on for at least two hours.
2. Remove bandage, rinse gently with cold water and blot dry.
3. Apply Bacitracin ointment 4 x a day and blot out the excess.
4. Keep tattoo fresh and open to the air. Do not bandage.
5. For the first week, avoid swimming or long soaking in the water.
6. For the first month, avoid too much exposure to the sun.
7. Do not pick or scratch scabs
8. Itching is relieved by slapping or alcohol.
9. Keep tattoo covered with loose clothing.

* Bandaging Summary 1. After tattooing clean whole area w/ green soap & white paper towel. 2. Spray it with alcohol and hold a paper towel on it. 3. apply film of Bacitracin ointment. 4. Cover with bandage or Handi-Wrap and securely tape it on.

I have yet to try this method, but have seen a few tattoos which have been bandaged with handi-wrap and they turned out just fine. (Huck writes that the handi-wrap stops people from peeling off the bandage in the first few hours to show friends.)

1.11 The Noxzema Method From Lance Bailey

This method is recommended by Suzanne at Creative Tattoo (Ann Arbor, Michigan)

1. Remove bandage after 4 - 5 hours.
2. Wash gently with soap or water.
3. Do *not* scrub or soak until completely healed (usually a week). Showering, however, is OK.
4. Usually necessary to re-bandage.
5. Keep tattoo OUT OF THE SUN or tanning booths while healing. Once healed, ALWAYS use sunscreen on colors.
6. We recommend Noxema Medicated Skin Lotion twice a day to aid healing & comfort. DO NOT USE Vaseline, oils, anything greasy, or anything with cortisone. Oils block your skin from contact with air, inhibiting healing
7. Tattoo "peels" in 4-7 days. Do not pick or scratch!



“Your tattoo was applied with sterile equipment and procedure, and with non-toxic colors. We guarantee the workmanship. Healing and caring of your tattoo is YOUR responsibility.”

This is how I healed a 3-inch band around my right ankle. While the healing was more like 2 weeks, I also protected it from the shower with a bag. For the last few tattoos I noticed that after I stop covering it in the shower (after about 2 weeks), the tattoo seems to speed up in healing. I suspect that this might be either timing (it was ready to heal), or the action of the shower helps to knock off any dead skin thus promoting better healing.

I only used a wee bit of Noxzema twice a day, leaving the art “moist and glistening” but with no “smears of white cream.” Am very happy with this method. The cream really does help the itching and the final result is a good deep black.

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Alien Tattoos



Alien Tattoos



Alien Tattoos



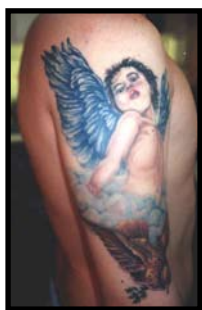
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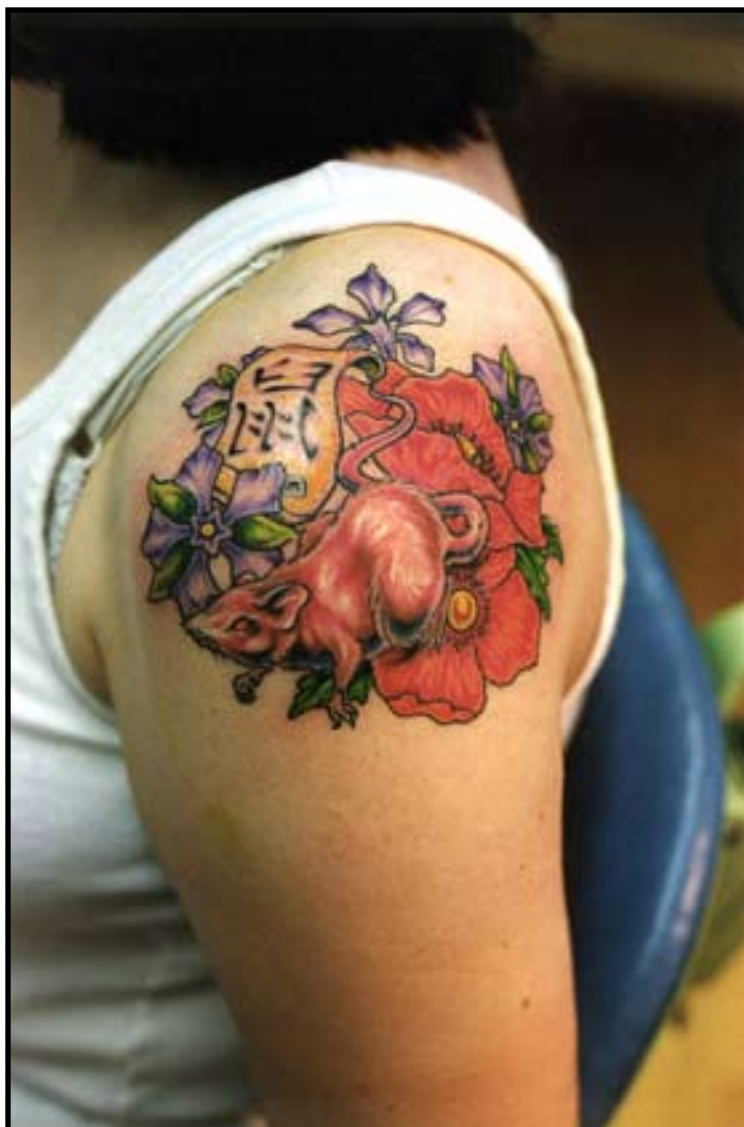


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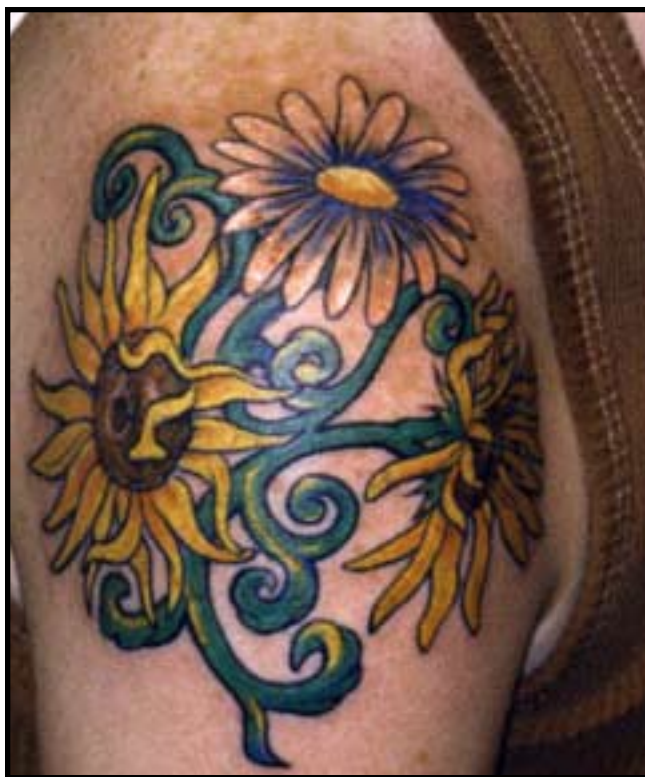
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Monster Tattoos



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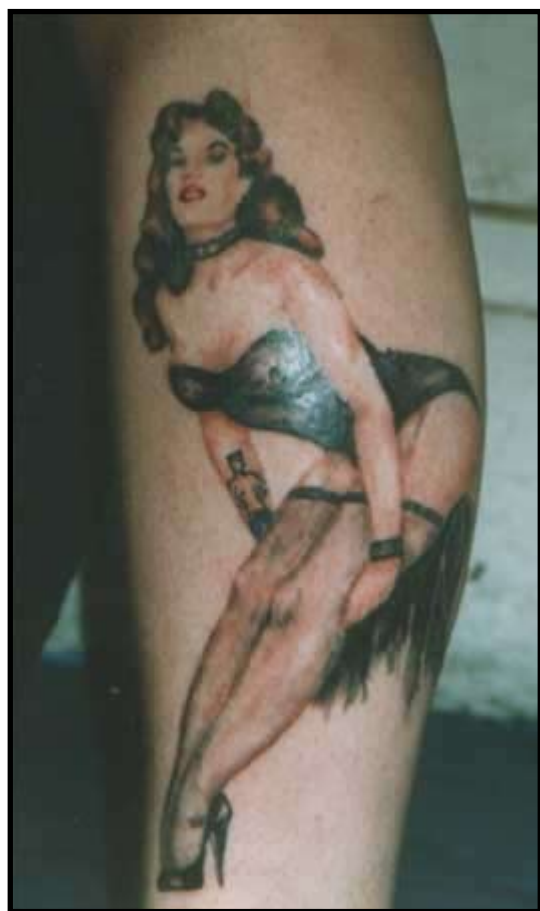
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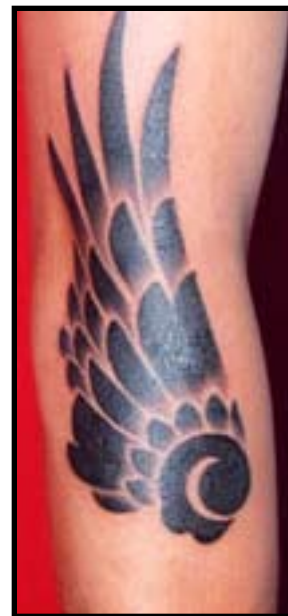
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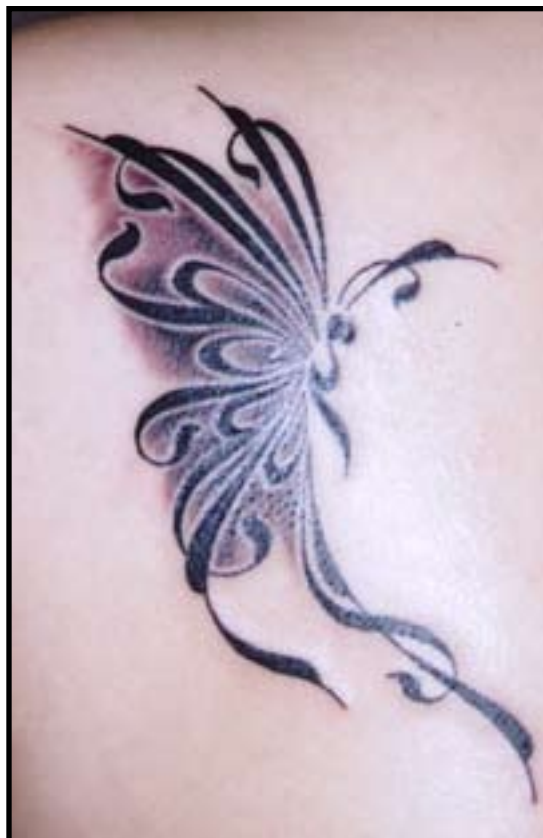
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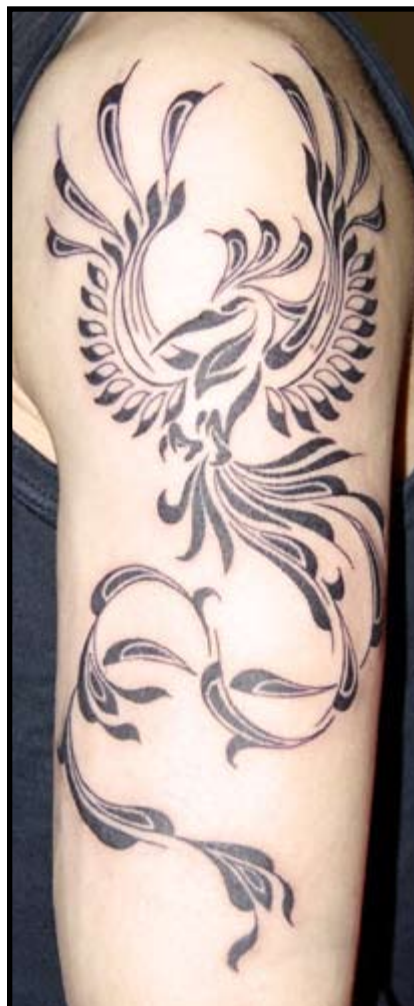


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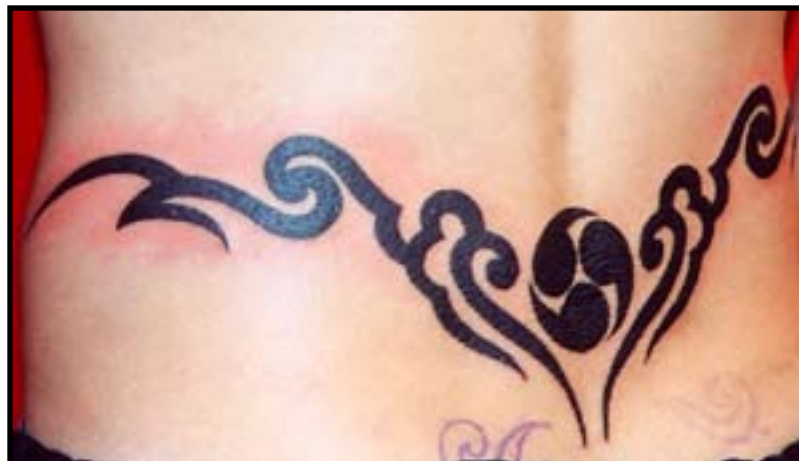
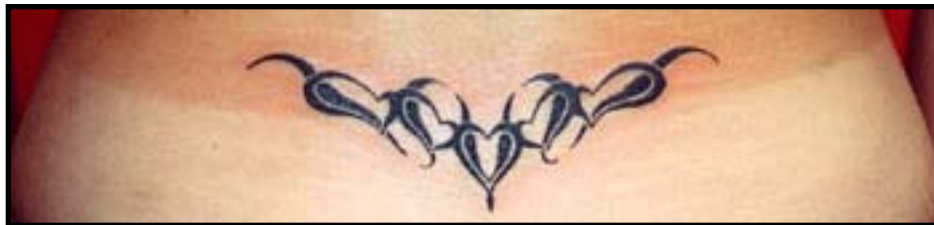


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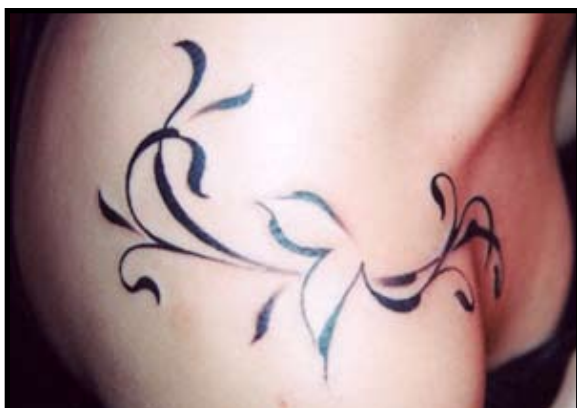


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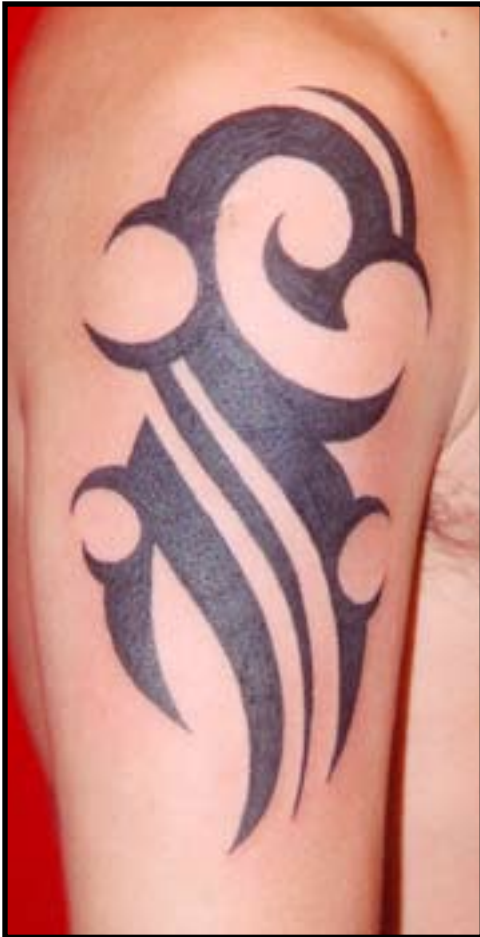
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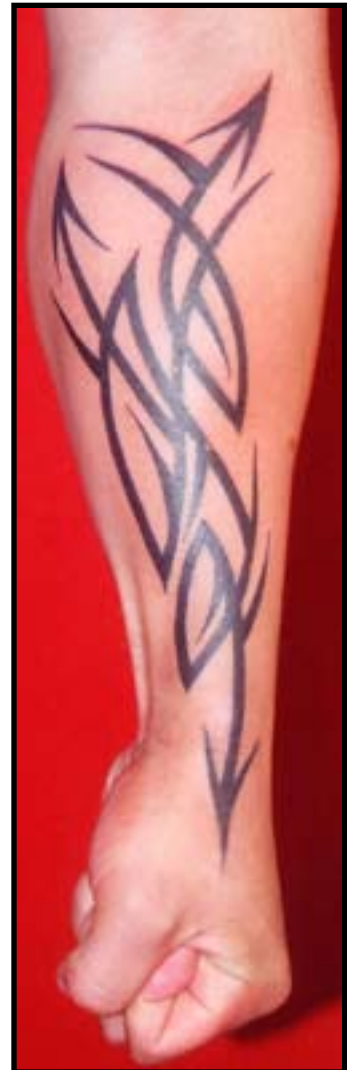
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